S 3505
0564
7
911
opy 1

THE TWELFTH CHRISTMAS

MARJORIE BENTON COOKE

THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
1800

Class [illegible]

Book [illegible]

THE TWELFTH
CHRISTMAS

By the same author

TO MOTHER

Fifty Cents

The Twelfth Christmas

The Christ Child's Revelation

By

MARJORIE BENTON COOKE

CHICAGO
FORBES & COMPANY
1911

PS 3505
.O564T7
1911

MCW Ag 23 11.
D.K. 6-14-30

Copyright, 1911, by
Forbes & Company

34
Cooke

©Cl. A295329

CHARACTERS

Mary, the mother of Jesus

Marah, a little child

The Christ Child

PLACE

Joseph's Cottage in Nazareth

The Twelfth Christmas

A COTTAGE in Nazareth, with a garden about it. It is the twelfth birthday of Jesus. Through the open door at twilight Mary is heard singing at her work. A troop of children swarm up the road, toward the house, shouting and wrangling. The Christ Child defies them all, protecting a little girl, who makes for shelter in the garden Mary appears at the door, and speaks to them reproachfully.

MARY

My Son, my Son, what means this bitter fight?
Dost Thou lift hand against a fellow child?

Ah, Mother, they did beat the little Marah,
Who had not strength enough to run away.
A pack of boys did crowd around, like dogs,
To snap and snarl and bite their weakly prey.
So I did push them back, and bid them cease—
Whereon they turned upon me in their wrath—
'T was all that I could do to beat them off
While Marah ran to hide within our gates.
Mother, they spat on me, and stoned me, too!

[*Mary puts her arms about Him with sudden tenderness.*]

MARY

My little Son, 'tis not for Thee to fight,

But to teach peace to all the world of men.
This Marah hath a devil, so they say.

THE CHRIST CHILD

Ah, Mother, if thou could'st have seen her eyes—
They were just like some hurted, hunted thing,
A little lamb's, before the sacrifice
Of Passover, which is led forth to die.
Where did she run to, Mother, did'st thou see?

MARY

Yonder, behind the laurel, 'twas, I think.

THE CHRIST CHILD

Marah, come out. They cannot hurt thee, now.

She's frightened, Mother, can'st thou make her come?

MARY

Come hither, Marah, thou art safe enough.

[*An elf-like child comes toward them.*]

What dost thou in the woods so much alone?

MARAH

I listen to the grass, and to the trees,
And whisper comfort to the bruiséd reed.

MARY

Poor child, she hath a sun-spot in her head.

THE CHRIST CHILD

But, Mother, look, she hath such strange, sad eyes,
I think she sees through Heaven and up to God.

MARY

Perhaps, my Seer-Child, Thou hast found a flower,
Where I had passed along and seen a weed.
I must get to my spinning, else the day
Will pass but like a shadow that declineth.

[*She goes into the house and the Christ Child sits by the door. Marah comes and stands before Him.*]

MARAH

I love Thee—shall I sing to Thee a song?

THE CHRIST CHILD

Aye, Marah, sit beside me here, and sing.

MARAH

[*Sings.*]

A stiff flower grew
On a prickly stem,

Just an outcast weed,
Sown where all eyes missed it—
  But the purple flower
  Changed to thistledown
When the sunbeam kissed it.

A cramped creature lived
  In a chrysalis,
Hidden in darkness,
Where no sun ray cleft it.
  But the poor dead shell
  Bloomed a butterfly
When the white soul left it.

THE CHRIST CHILD

What does it mean, O Marah?

MARAH

Nay, an' Thou

Must ask the butterfly, for I'll not tell.
What did'st Thou up among the hills to-day?

THE CHRIST CHILD

Witch-child, how did'st thou know I wandered there?

MARAH

No matter how I knew. What did'st Thou see?

THE CHRIST CHILD

I saw and smelt the earth all soft with showers;
I saw the hills on every side rejoice,
And pastures freshly clothed with fat'ning flocks,
And valleys filled with trees all faintly green,

With birds a-twitter in the twigs thereof.
All this, I saw, and more, O Marah mine.

MARAH

The hawks will kill the birds, and priests
the sheep!

THE CHRIST CHILD

Who tells thee such tales?

MARAH

No one tells—they're known
To all the blighted children of the sun.
But hark—the cricket calls me, I must go.

THE CHRIST CHILD

Thou are not like the rest, thou art so gentle,
I love thee best of all—wilt come again,
And I will take thee up among the hills?

I love Thee, and I'll come.

[*She runs away, singing.*]

Where the firefly leads
I follow,
Over dale and through
The hollow,
Skimming like the light-
Winged swallow,
Where the bullfrogs croak
And wallow.
On I fly where willows mourn,
And the mildew rots the corn;
Where the Black-Witch winds her horn—
To the spot where Night is born.

[*The Christ Child sits alone in the twilight. Mary comes to the door and bends to touch His hair.*]

MARY

What dost Thou see, my thoughtful, sad-eyed Son?

THE CHRIST CHILD

Mother, why is it men do hate and kill
And torture harmless things?

MARY

It is because
The world is full of sin and unredeemed.

THE CHRIST CHILD

And will the world be always full of fear?

MARY

Nay, Child, a day is soon to dawn, when peace,
A healing river will o'erflow the earth.

The lion, then, shall lie down with the lamb,
All men like brothers shall go hand in hand,
And a little Child shall lead them.

THE CHRIST CHILD

But when, my Mother, will this great day be?

MARY

Some day, dear heart, in God's good time 'twill come.

[*Mary sits down beside her child, and He leans against her breast.*]

THE CHRIST CHILD

Hark! hear that bird call out—"Good night, tired world!"

* * *

Mother, why am I different from the rest?

MARY

What dost Thou mean, my Son?

THE CHRIST CHILD

Dost thou not know?
Why am I so unlike the children here
Who hurt things, and who fight and sometimes kill?
I am afraid of pain—I am afraid.

MARY

My Child!

[*She gathers Him in her arms as if to protect Him, and there is silence save for the night sounds.*]

THE CHRIST CHILD

Mother, when first I went up to the Temple,
Why did old Simeon take me up and say—
"My God, I thank Thee I have lived to see

Fulfillment of Thy promise ere I die"?
And why did Anna of Jerusalem
Thank God and kiss my hands and weep
and pray?

MARY

Thou art so young to know Thy holy
mission!
See—how the Heavens are rolled like to a
scroll,
As if some mighty hand did wait to write!

THE CHRIST CHILD

Once, Mother, Anna says, long, long ago,
An angel came to Joseph in the night,
And bade him rise and flee from Bethlehem.
The next day Herod's slaves came, in a
horde,

Butchered and slew the babes and little ones,
And only I was saved.

MARY

Old Anna should not tell Thee bloody tales!

THE CHRIST CHILD

Why, Mother, was I saved?

MARY

The time has come. O God, give Thou me strength!
Come, lean Thy head upon my breast, dear One.
Long ago, when the world was full of sin,
When fear and lust and murder stalked the earth,

God promised men to send His Only Son
To live among them, and to bear their sins,
And in the end to die, that they might live.
And so God chose a woman poor and weak,
Whose lot it was to bear this Son of God.
She was to love and rear Him as her Son,
She was to teach her Child and guide His feet
Adown the thorn-strewn way to Calvary.
Hers it was to make His mouth a sharp sword,
To cut and hew the growth of sin and shame;
Her task it was to fashion and to shape
A shaft to pierce the old world's hardened heart.
Ah, little Son, that mother strove so hard
To day by day grow worthy of her charge.

And every hour she died upon her tree
Of sacrifice and agony!

THE CHRIST CHILD

But thou—
Why dost thou weep so bitterly?

MARY

I weep
Because I love e'en as that mother loved.

[*The Child soothes her gently.*]

THE CHRIST CHILD

But, Mother, when will God's son have to die?

MARY

When men, in whose midst He has spent His life,

Whom He has taught and healed and raised again
From Death; whom He has loved, and suffered for,
Shall stone, deny, revile and spit on Him,
And crucify Him on a cross of pain!

THE CHRIST CHILD

O Mother—why?

MARY

Because great love alone redeems the world.
And so the Christ and God, His Father, suffer,
Aye, and the mother, she must suffer, too,
And thus the world is cleansed with tears of blood!

THE CHRIST CHILD

My Mother, still dost weep?

[*She lifts her head and looks at Him. Sud-*

denly a shadow like the burden of the years falls across His face.]

What dost thou mean?
Mother, am I the one called Prince of Peace?
Am I the little Child who comes to lead them?
O Mother, must I be that little Child?
Must I alone redeem this great, great world?
And then the cross! O Mother, I'm afraid—
Thou wilt not let them take me from thine arms,
And crucify me? Mother, hold me close!
O Mother, I'm afraid—I am afraid!

[*Mary holds Him in her arms, weeping.*]

MARY

Thou must be brave, remembering Thy Father.

But God's so far away!

MARY

Then for her sake
Who holds Thee close and loves Thee—who doth long
To take Thy burden for her own, and save these hands
The nail prints and these lips the bitter drink.
Thou, Son, must make me worthy of my charge,
And brave enough to sacrifice mine all.
Together must we learn the scroll of pain,
Thou for the world's sake, I for Thine, my Son.

[*The Child slips from her arms and stands*

beside her, His hand upon her head. Out of the darkness a white light grows about His brow and for the first time the Christ-look dawns upon His face.]

THE CHRIST CHILD

Nay, Mother mine, weep not for me. Henceforth
I'll be a sturdy staff to comfort thee!

[*He looks off at the moonlit hills and, slowly, with outstretched arms, the Christ speaks.*]

THE CHRIST

O great, wide world, I've come to cleanse and save,
O world of sorrow, world of sin and night,
I gladly lay upon thine altar high
This life of mine, and may it usher in
A dawn of love to flood the universe,

And shed its life adown all time.
Let me atone, O God, for all men's sins;
Oh, let me free the earth from all its pain;
Oh, let me take the sea's moan and the wind's
Wild wail from them and make them mine!
Oh, let me take the cry from human souls;
Oh, let me bear the weight of human shame;
Oh, let me suffer all, that in the end
I may, through love, lead back mankind to Thee!
O great, white world, kneel thou a penitent—
Make me thy prayer, and send me back to God!

MARY

The love that passeth understanding
Hath come unto the Holy-Born this night!

21 1911

One copy del. to Cat. Div.

AUG 21 1911

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
0 018 604 908 1